The pit and the pendulum

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/9781298.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	F/F, F/M, Gen, M/M
Fandoms:	Hannibal Lecter Series - All Media Types, Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham & Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Beau Graham/Beverly Katz, Hannibal Lecter & Mischa Lecter, Team Sassy Science - Relationship, Will Graham & Rustin Cohle
Characters:	As above, Jack Crawford, Bella Crawford, Bedelia Du Maurier, franklyn froidveaux, Jimmy Price, Brian Zeller, OCs, Chiyoh, Rustin "Rust" Cohle
Additional Tags:	season one AU, encephalitis, Japanese themes, Hallucinations, on a scale of nought to ten Garrett Jacob Hobbs how bad are you today?, Hannigram - Freeform, is Hannibal the Ripper?, Dr Plushy Pants, Little bit of sex in chapter 4, Changed the rating, Abigail is the Queen of Teflon, Unexpected crossover with True Detective, cos Will Graham has a type, a metaphorical type
Language:	English
Series:	Part 20 of The Dr Plushy Pants Collection
Stats:	Published: 2017-02-16 Completed: 2017-02-17 Words: 17,960 Chapters: 5/5

The pit and the pendulum

by AtticusCrete

Summary

Will is finally diagnosed. And oh the joy of sleep. A chance for everyone else to re-group whilst Will is out of fucks to give about anything. Better living through medication. Hannibal is all efficient stethoscopes and diagnoses and chicken soup.

And there's a special guest appearance by Rustin Cohle, from True Detective, who Will used to know when he was a cop in New Orleans. Will Graham has a type, for sure...

And, I still suck at summaries. I should spend a day practising or something. But hell I wrote all this episode in under 24 hours, so never mind about summaries. I do the opposite of summaries. What ever that is? This meanwhile is more than 17,000 words. Well just FML cos it's great to just sit and write and have nice people read it.

Notes

Oh and... in this 'episode' this AU hits 200,000 words... since December 2016.

I lost one plot and found another. Lucky me. "Share and enjoy"

The pit

Over lunch with Julia and Tonio Mischa shares all the photos she has taken that morning with Will's phone camera and her new Polaroid instamatic. Chiyoh joined them for the last forty minutes. It had all ended as a snowball fight. Chiyoh and Mischa against Will and Hannibal. There were some photos of Hannibal looking remarkably dishevelled and informal. And happy. Nakedly, unreservedly, remarkably happy.

In particular there is one picture which shows Mischa stuffing snow down his collar, as he lies prone on the ground, Mischa sitting astride him. Both breathless with laughter. The photograph shows both their faces in an uncomplicated picture of beloved siblings. It's probably the best of the lot.

Along with the snowball fight they'd all made snow people, though Will had made snow dogs. There's a funny picture of him being mobbed by snow dogs, it had taken ages to get it right and involved several attempts at getting him into position without knocking over at least one of the statues, or Will. They'd been laughing so hard one of the dogs kept losing a back end.

Lunch is enjoyable and also full of good humour. Will manages to mostly conceal the fact that his head is now utterly killing him. When they arrive back he excuses himself with a smile that tries to hide how bad it is, slides into their bedroom, and lies down and places a cold damp flannel across his face. Blocking out the light.

He wakes later in the afternoon to find Hannibal has brought him tea and petit fours.

'How are you?'

'Honestly?' He sees the look on Hannibal's face 'yeah I know, otherwise what's the point right? Not too good. I can't shake it now. And there's three Garrett Jacob Hobbs in here with us. I saw the feathered stag earlier. Overall, I think it's possible I'm worse. If you hoped I'd be able to take a turn driving tomorrow I think that's not very likely. Sorry'

'That is the least of my concerns. If it is necessary Chiyoh will take a turn, she has done so before'

'That sounds good. Sorry to be such a dampener. Good this morning though. Lots of fun. I don't think we get enough ridiculous in our lives. So it's doubly good. No bodies, you know?'

'Snow bodies indeed'

'I mentioned my head didn't I?'

'Shall I bring you something else?'

'Nah. I'll try and be upright for a bit. Thanks Hannibal. Give me a hand?'

Hannibal pulls him to his feet and then holds him gently. Will rests his head on Hannibal's shoulder.

'S'good. Helps. T'anks. It's definitely quite a bit worse. Maybe I should sit down again'

Will sits down heavily on the edge of the futon. His head in his hands.

'God it hurts. I really hope Donald has something to tell us day after tomorrow. I'm not sure how I can go on like this. Otherwise. It's got to be biological, hasn't it?'

Hannibal looks down at Will frowning slightly. He leaves the room and returns with a notebook and pen

'Will, it's 4:30 could you please draw me a clock face'

'What? Like a regular one? Sure. Why?'

'Humour me please'

Will takes the pad and draws a clock face with the hands pointing to half past four. Hannibal takes it from him and frowns.

'Will this shows hemispatial neglect. It might look normal to you but it isn't. I should have thought of this sooner. With the odd scent and fever..'

'Now you tell me it's odd. So, what is it, what do we do?'

'I'm going to call Donald and see if he has further ideas'

Will makes a face at him

'I don't want to delay, I have just an inkling of an idea. Let's see.....Donald? It's Hannibal Lecter. I'm sorry to call you out of hours. Will is considerably worse. I've had him draw a clock. Significant hemispatial neglect. Right hemisphere I think. Yes. Yes. I wondered that too. Viral? Yes. As do I. Will you? I would be very grateful. I shall owe you quite a large favour. Thank you Donald..... so, Donald is going to the hospital to get the results, they will already be in but he's not due back until the 4th. But he's going to check.'

'What do you think it is? He said something you agreed with?'

'I think it might be encephalitis'

'What does that mean? Fuck. How bad will it be if it is?'

'It is completely curable, especially if it is viral in origin. The other kind is trickier but still manageable. You've had bad symptoms but no seizures yet. I imagine if we get you to hospital and they begin therapy straight away it can take between four and six weeks to begin recovery.'

'Begin!!? How long until I recover?'

'It could be as long as 26 weeks, more if you falter in your drug regime, or there's a secondary infection'

'Fucking hell. That's, what, wait. Six months!! I can't be out for six months Jack will go ape-shit'

'If you have encephalitis he will have no choice. We might consider the very occasional consultation. But no more than that. And only absolute minimum field work, and then, only if you respond well to the drugs.'

'Wow! You got bossy real fast'

'Yes. And I will continue so. This is not something to trifle with Will. It is potentially life threatening. It can radically alter your neurological state, and lead to personality change'

'Ok. Now I'm seriously terrified. Jimmy says you do this rumbling bat-shit scarey thunder god thing. I thought he was exaggerating. I've just never seen it have I? Hannibal, please, don't be..'

He tails off, at a loss. This isn't the Hannibal that he knows inside and out. This is a Hannibal he's rather frightened of or for?

'Will, I'm sorry. It's an inflammation of the brain. Probably the right sphere as it's the left side that's not presenting correctly. I'm alarmed too. I was hoping it was something....' he too tails off

'What? What?'

'Less severe or complicated' he takes a deep breath remembering that scaring your lover with knowledge they don't share that impacts them directly is not recommended in all the relationship how to be a real person manuals. Will is looking up at him from the futon. Wide eyes and genuine fear.

'My love, my love' Hannibal drops down beside him on the futon 'that you have kept going until now suggests it is not so advanced. Donald will call from the hospital. I'm sorry. Let's be calm until we know what steps to take next.'

'I'll be calm then! Ok. Ok. Ok. So if he says yes, do I need to do a specific test or are these symptoms enough? Will we go to the nearest hospital? Will he fax them the results? Will you tell Mischa? Bugger, this will mess up their schedule. And yours. Sorry. Sorry. Shit. I'll have to phone dad. And Bev, and Jimmy and Brian. Ok. That's it for now. Brain on fire. Fuck. Oh shit. Agent Krendler. Jack.'

Hannibal holds Will close. Will doesn't cry or break down any further. He feels a kind of coolness where before he felt only a desert wildfire rushing forwards consuming everything in its path, leaving only ashes and dust. The coolness is like a draught of sweet cold water, the sweetness that knowledge or understanding brings.

When Donald finally calls it's almost an anticlimax. All four of them are sitting reading in the living room. Will still leaning against Hannibal their two zaisu pulled close together so Hannibal can keep an arm around him. It's Hannibal that Donald calls.

'Ok. It is encephalitis. Get him to the nearest hospital, where are you? Text me the hospital details, I'll fax everything through. Tell Will not to worry too much. We've got it in good time. I know he'll feel grim but reassure him. Let me know when you're back in Baltimore. I'll stay in touch via the hospital too. Ok Hannibal. You shouldn't fret either. You caught it, good job. Probably saved him a lot more grief.'

Two hours later Will is in hospital. Admitted as an acute case. Beau's been told and is on his way, with Beverly. Mischa, Chiyoh and Hannibal will all stay. Hannibal has made a list of all the patients he will need to contact. He will have to speak to each one personally. This may be a protracted absence so it needs to be worked through. Some of his patients will resist even a temporary referral. Never the less this is as it shall be. All his focus shall be on Will now.

Will has phoned Agent Krendler, dismayed but understanding. The conversation with Jack is a tougher call

'Jack? Hello, it's Will. Yeah, you too. How's the snow there. Ok. Bella? Ok. That sounds good. Yeah, give her mine too. Ok. So. No dead bodies or bits of evidence but I've got bad news or very bad news, which would you like first? Very bad? Ok. The very bad is that in the first instance I'll be out for four to six weeks, and on only partial call up for the next six months or so. I know. I know. I know that too. I did say six months. Do you want to hear the bad news now? Ok. I have encephalitis. We're leaving for the hospital in about five minutes. Of course. Of course I do. Fuck it Jack! That's out of line. Ok. Ok. Alright then. No not Johns Hopkins. I'm at the cabin. Yeah. New Year surprise for Hannibal. No. I didn't think this was going to happen. Yeah alright, jokes on me I guess. No he had elephantiasis. No. really, completely different pathology. Inflammation of the brain. Yes it does. And the rest! Ok. I'll put in the paperwork. Can you email Hannibal? Alright. Thanks Jack. Thanks'

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The hospital room isn't spectacular but it's not awful either. They get the drug therapy started straight away, the doctor on call rather excited at his first case of encephalitis. In the end he talks with Hannibal together with Donald on speaker on Hannibal's cell.

Will lies there letting it finally all wash over him. This is great! He doesn't even have to pretend he has any more fucks to give. What ever they've given him he feels a little swimmy. Will has already signed papers saying either Hannibal or Beau can make medical decisions relating to him, if it becomes necessary and he gets worse before he gets better. He decided in the moment not to freak out about it. A little tempting to, but hey, Hannibal had looked pretty smug to be given legal proxy status. It's only one step away from something more permanent that would give him the same rights. Will's pretty sure the thought has occurred to Hannibal too.

'Hannibal?' He interrupts the doctors' conversation 'sorry to break in. Can you check about the dog kennels. Oh and maybe Alana too. Try not to do "I told you so". Actually fuck that. Lay

it on real thick. Make sure I'm awake too. I want to hear that. Ok. Sorry about that' he goes quiet and withdraws inside

'Will, stay with me, we'll be finished in a moment'

'Where would I go? I am literally incapable of going anywhere, really'

Hannibal frowns just slightly and turns back to his conversation. They agree some further minutiae and when they wrap it up, Hannibal returns to Will's side.

'Will you bring food some times? Please? That would be nice. Can dad stay with you? And Bev. Can you ask Chiyoh. I guess they can share. Better ask. Don't let Bev cry over everyone. Oh. Beau and Mischa, ok, I. That's too much for me to think through. Hannibal could you manage it as you'd like it to be. Sorry.'

'I may have already told Beau about Mischa, we'll tell Beverly when they arrive. Chiyoh has already offered.'

'Oh. Ok. Good. Ok. I'm not even going to try and work that out. Turns out to be a good thing. Surprise is on me in that case. I'm so tired. Sorry. For everything. I can't even..'

He's possibly asleep. Or just run out of energy to speak. Hannibal sits beside him on the edge of the bed and takes Will's nearest hand in his. He kisses the knuckles. Now that Will has surrendered himself to the omniscience of medical science Hannibal can see that there are tensions and terrors gradually fading from his face and the angles of his body.

Hannibal wonders what Will might see of him now were he to really look. Hannibal already feels raw, as though a layer of skin has been peeled or burnt off, getting down to the layer that Will already inhabits, sub-dermal. Hannibal wonders sometimes if Will sees what he sees, feels what he feels, knows what he knows. As he knows Will.

But this train of thought stops at the next station. Will has successfully utterly deceived him. Over an extended period, not just about new year but about Mischa. And to be sure he has done something similar with Beau. But there is a different emphasis in there. A different motivation. A different level of subterfuge. He is not a passive observer, but an active and assertive participant in this waltz of theirs.

He squeezes Will's hand lightly, Will opens his eyes 'I love you Hannibal. Thank you' he waves his other hand round lightly 'for all this. Don't stay tonight. Please'

Hannibal is about to object

'I'll just sleep. And I need you to look after Beau and Beverly. Please. Maybe bring some breakfast tomorrow. A bit late. I need a lie in. Oh god. I get a lie in. I love you. Please. Just'

He trails off again. Hannibal runs Wills hand against the side of his face. There is light stubble there now, so it's a gentle scrape. Hannibal understands Will's point. He is a little reluctant though. After thirty minutes where Will remains resolutely asleep Hannibal concedes and returns to the cabin.

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When Beau and Beverly arrive they have to be dissuaded from going straight to the hospital. Beverly surprises Hannibal by clinging to him tightly for a number of minutes. He's slightly less surprised to be hugged hard by Beau

'Will said you worked it out. God Hannibal, what if you hadn't? I know the other Doc might have. But how long? This is awful. What if he gets worse? Sorry. Sorry. We held it together for as long as the drive took. Now I think I might fall over. I'm too old for this stuff. God. Who'd be a parent? It's a killer'

'Beau, Beverly you too, come into the kitchen. You're going to eat something, then you're going to be effectively compelled to go to sleep, Will told me to remind you the walls are made from paper. He said something about not dishing the dirt in audible voices. I think he meant other things but was too exhausted to find an appropriate euphemism. In the morning we will eat breakfast and all go to see him. The doctor is fine with multiple guests as long as we don't overwork him. So far he has simply stopped mid sentence and fallen asleep'

'Oh, like when he got kidnapped by the fun guy?'

Beau looks at Bev 'what fun guy? When did he get kidnapped? I know about the weird mountain thing. Did I miss this?'

'Months ago, but after Hobbs. Probably got lost in everything else. He was on some meds that made him very disinhibited, he was very funny. It wasn't long after he and Hannibal met' Bev smiles broadly at Hannibal 'it was then I thought it might actually work' Hannibal smiles at her 'as did I' she looks delighted and mentally thinks 'yes! Plan!'

'I can hardly keep up. Hey have you told Agent Crawford yet? What did he say?'

'A mixture of things. Dismayed for Will I believe. And dismayed for the case load too. Though it annoys me, it is not surprising. It is his life's work after all, it is hard to reproach one so dedicated'

'I think I can try. No Bev I won't, but it's hard, ok? Just right now, it's hard. Shit I'm being a grouch. I'm tired. Food did you say? Great. Thank you. Let's have at it. Really I could eat a horse'

'You won't have to'

'Good to know'

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Mischa is delighted by Beau, even a tired and grumpy Beau, she whispers to Hannibal 'if Will is like this in 25 years he will be lovely' Hannibal smiles. Women do seem to like Beau, he is a charming man, and he always seems genuinely interested in what people are saying to him. She's a little shy with Bev, but Bev shows a sweet lovely warm side that makes of Mischa a devoted friend. Bev teases her just very very slightly and Mischa looks both surprised and

overjoyed. Teasing means friendship. Otherwise it's just mean. Mischa could do with some more friends. For just a moment Hannibal wonders if this is what it felt like after Will introduced Beau to Beverly. He fears for his own defences against the combined forces of Beverly Katz and his beloved sister.

Chiyoh returns from Indigo's house and is introduced to both Beau and Bev. She starts out a little formal but Beau seems to work some magic on her, and she flushes under the attention. Beverly clearly thinks she's as cute as a button. But Chiyoh ducks that kind of scent of interest. Hannibal is intrigued that Beau seems unbothered by it in the slightest.

When they all depart to sleep Hannibal makes them all valerian tea. It's not the most flavourful herbal sleep aid. But it's not the worst either. He drinks his cup with a little honey. Lies down on the futon and thinks of Will asleep (hopefully) in his hospital bed. Safe. Quiet.

Hannibal turns on his side, exchanges his pillow for Will's, smells his already departing scent, now just lingering slightly, and then pulls another pillow into his arms. A poor substitute, but he aches with how much he misses Will. Despite the subterfuge. Because of it.

No one expects the Spanish Inquisition, no one

Chapter Summary

> Is he or isn't he? Did she or didn't she? Will she or won't she? Plus drugged Will (for medical reasons, rather than cannibal), a Freddie Lounds who is out of her depth. Alana, also out her depth. Jack, possibly out of his depth, hard to tell as he's wearing his winter hat and that's above the water line.
>
> Still sucking at summaries Electra? Yeah. But the rest is ok...

Beau looks down at Will, he's still asleep, tied up to bags full of gloop, machines that indicate the vagaries of life, slithering tubes going somewhere it's best not to ask about.. He wants to reach out and stroke him. Hold him in his arms. His little lad. It makes his heart ache.

'I know you're here dad. I'm not broke yet. Thanks for coming.' Will keeps his eyes closed but he smiles slightly

'Will. Alright then. You've scared me proper this time. Worse than when you had measles as a little un. Encephalitis. I had to go and look it up. Wikipedia managed to terrify me. Hannibal says they pretty well caught it in time. Bet it doesn't feel like it does it?'

'I'm ok. Bit floaty. The drugs are great. I. Can't. Really. Focus very well. Still fuck off boiling though. Brain's on fire. Did Hannibal tell you that? Where's Bev?'

'They let me in first'

'Wow. How did you do that? I can't imagine anyone getting in Hannibal's way, maybe Bev if you sweet-talked her'

'They offered, said I had the greater claim. Don't know about that. Feel like I let you down' he sounds regretful and miserable

'It's only love that matters right now dad. The rest of it is irrelevant. You're here. Now. Out of love. It's all I care about this minute. I asked. You came. End of. Love. You. Too. Sorry. Bit tired. Others?'

Beau goes to the door and speaks to Beverly and Hannibal outside 'come in, he's awake, just. Bit groggy, maybe just tired, or the meds'

Bev comes in looking terrified 'you're the pits Graham. I really loathe you. You messed up a perfectly good set up back in Virginia. Had to go and be fuck off properly ill, made us drive all this way, and we're in a bloody paper walled room. You're a little shit you know that?' Then she bursts into tears. Will holds his hand out and she grabs it.

'Don't use my hand. As a snot rag Bev! Use your own. Idiot. Love you. Sorry about the sex up. Sorry. Not right.. Set up. Set up. Can't manage. Sentences. Or sense. Looking after dad? You better'

'Yeah. Idiot. Still a paper room though'

'Practice keeping quiet then. Be nice for all of us. Hannibal?'

'Will'

'Hey'

'Indeed'

'Are you allowed to feed me what ever it is that smells great. Tell me it's something. Really. Fancy. Is it?'

'And if I tell you do I risk mockery and risible comment?'

'Could be. If I can. Manage. It. Risible especially'

'My love'

There's one of those sort of sweet moments where those who witness a shot of love feel as though they might possibly be trespassing in the dreams of others. Hannibal clears his throat

'Your doctor has given me a list of things to avoid. He is markedly unambitious in range so I am running the menu past Donald and one of his colleagues'

'What could make it worse?'

'Sea urchin. Members of the nightshade family possibly. Asafoetida'

'Ok. I'll manage without them then. I hope it's not potatoes? I like potatoes'

'Certain varieties of tomato as I understand it'

'Who knew?'

'Will, would you like something now?'

'Yeah. Please. Hungry as anything. You might have to. Feed me. I don't know if I can hold anything. No one laugh ok? Please?'

'Only if you dribble'

'Dad? Make him be nice?'

'Oh no. Nice try. Leave me out of it'

'Bev?'

'I'm waiting for the dribbling. Get to it Hannibal, ten dollars says he dribbles in the first minute'

'Where's the call button? My brain's, on fire. I don't need, this abuse. You monsters. Ofsmuffleshwefl. Ok that's nice, delicious actually, thank you. Not dribbling. At all. Really. Ok. More please?'

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Back at Port Haven Jack Crawford is looking narrowly at Abigail. Personally he'd like to tear her a new one. But he's keeping quiet for now. Keeping an eye on Dr Bloom instead.

'Abigail, you must understand. None of this reflects well on you. There's evidence connected to all the murders. It's not just one or two items it's a whole catalogue'

'You won't believe me even if I tell you so I don't see why I should bother. Where's Dr Lecter anyway I thought he was coming?'

'He's busy. He won't be able to come for a while'

'Oh. Oh? What's the matter with him?'

'He's fine. Just family matters'

'Oh. Is it that woman causing trouble with goggles? Dr Graham?'

'I don't know who you're talking about Abigail. And none of them are your business anyway'

'It's ok. I'm just as happy with you. Dr Lecter creeps me out a bit'

Alana frowns. She knows Hannibal can be intimidating, but he is also kind and very patient focussed.

'Why do you say that?'

'I don't want to talk about it'

'Abigail, you can trust me, trust us'

'He said something. After they shot dad. Made me think he knew more than he let on. Scared me a bit. It's why I ran away from you that time in Minnesota. I hoped Nick had killed him. Sorry, I know I shouldn't say things like that. But he looked pathological. I was frightened of what he'd do'

Jack shifts in his seat. He doesn't like what Abigail's saying but there is a tiny piece of logic in there. He knows it's going to worm its way into his brain and wriggle. Hannibal was in the right places at the right time. Certainly for the two girls, even if he's out of the running for the other bodies, that was Hobbs. One of them. For sure.

'Alright Miss Hobbs, you say you've some suspicions of Dr Lecter. Why have you agreed to be in a car with him or go to his home?'

'I wasn't on my own with him. And isn't it better to keep an eye on people who might not be as friendly as they make out? He's got everyone fooled good and proper'

'Abigail? What do you mean?'

'You all act like he's some kind of saint. He's not though is he. Carrying on with that woman, leading Will on. And Dr Graham's not well is he? I bet Dr Lecter knew all about that. You just ask him. Strikes me you're all looking in the wrong direction. Easier to pin it all on me, or Nick, or Em. I'm sick of it. Really, I am'

'Miss Hobbs are you seriously telling me you think Dr Lecter had something to do with the deaths of Marissa Schurr and Cassie Boyle?'

'Yeah. Wouldn't be surprised if he tried to set Dr Graham up for it. If it doesn't work with me? You checked his place yet? See if there's any evidence there? Bet Dr Lecter is really helpful like, with the dogs, and keeping an eye on things when Dr Graham's busy or away or stuff. But you just think the suns shines out of his backside'

Alana and Jack exchange brief looks of uneasy concern. Certainly Hannibal has inserted himself very thoroughly into every aspect of Will's life. And Will is now seriously ill and in no fit state to counter any acts against him. Would be horrified at the thought of possible betrayal.

'Miss Hobbs' Jack sighs, he knows he'll have to follow this up in some way 'we'll look into your claims. We don't discriminate in who we do or don't investigate'

'All I'm saying is if I go missing you check his basement or vacation home, if he's got one, he seems the type'

'Abigail. Don't exaggerate. This seems a flight of fancy.'

'Right. Yeah. He's a friend of yours too isn't he? Good luck with that'

Later when Jack and Alana leave Port Haven she asks 'will you really check Will's house? He won't like it'

'I know. But we can say we're extending the warrant. You know. In case either the Hobbs girl or her cousin were there'

'We know one of them was because of the photos. And Will has been away from Wolf Trap quite a lot recently'

'Yeah don't remind me'

'You don't think there could possibly be anything in it'

'I don't. But I'm still going to check. We owe it to Will'

'What about Hannibal?'

'Got to clear him too. Can't be good having it hang over him in any way'

'Have you spoken to him since Will went into hospital?'

'Yesterday. Will's doing ok. Apparently Bev, his dad and he played poker for three hours and he still won'

'Despite his brain only half working? Poor Will'

'Poor them, they lost nearly a hundred dollars between them. Bev was sure she'd clean up'

Alana smiles about her friends. Maybe she and Margot could get up there to see Will. Though this could be tricky with Hannibal. He could be so odd and over protective. Maybe Abigail had a point. No. surely not. She's known Hannibal for years. And though he's a little unusual. She stops. No. this is all Abigail machinating.

Damn.

.....

'Mr Graham? This is Jack Crawford. Yes. How's he doing today? Good. That sounds promising. And that sounds like Will. Good. You bearing up? Must be a challenge. Our Beverly ok? Good. That's good. Look, you know about this evidence dump around Hannibal's house and car? We think they might have dropped some stuff at Will's, can you ask him if we can have a look? We'll be careful I promise. Sure ask him. No no reason. I can ask Hannibal if you prefer? Wasn't sure who was proxy. Ok. See what they say. I'll text Hannibal too. Cheers'

Dr Lecter, hope you're ok? I just spoke to Beau Graham. we'd like to check Will's place. See if there's evidence there. Can you check with Will that it's ok? Beau will also speak to you about it. I wasn't sure who is proxy if Will isn't up to it. Our best to Will, and you, hang in there Hannibal. Jack

Beau goes back into Will's room, he'd left it to take the call, not wanting to disturb Will who is asleep again. 'Hannibal that was Jack Crawford can I ask you something?'

'Of course, lets go outside. Beverly? Are you alright? Can we get you anything?'

'Awful hospital coffee would be good. Thanks Hannibal'

As Hannibal closes the door quietly behind him, he hears his cell buzz and retrieves it, and then looks down at it 'is it about searching Will's house?' he looks at Beau,

'What do you think? I don't really like it but does it look dodgy if Will, or we, say no?'

'Part of the house was searched when the symbols turned up all over the porch'

'Oh. I'd forgotten that. So it'd be since then they're concerned with?'

'I imagine so. Though I don't know how thorough that search was'

'Was Bev on it?'

'I think so. I'll get some coffee, see if she'll come out for a conversation about it, we can include her, unless you'd rather not?'

'If she's in, then great, I'll ask'

Hannibal brings back three coffees and a chocolate-coffee milkshake which Will might or might not want. Bev and Beau are sitting in the waiting area outside Will's room

'So what's the deal then? Why do they want to look now?'

'I'm not sure. Jack says they're concerned about Abigail or Matthew Brown planting more evidence. Maybe they've just got the personnel together. I know it's been a stretch. Maybe new information has come to light?'

'Hannibal. I don't like this. I think we should agree, if you're actually asking me (you are? Wow. That's nice of you. Thanks). But it smells bad. I know Jack'

'Do you think he has been leant on? And if so, by whom? I agree it is best to say yes. Though we should still ask Will'

'Ok. So. Ask Will first, and if he can decide we go with that. If he can't we say yes, is that it?' Beau looks at them both, Hannibal and Bev both nod.

'You know, I'm a bit of a bitch, but I just wonder.. I'm going to make a phone call, don't do anything just yet. I'm going to go outdoors for this one. I'd like you to preserve your ignorance of my nastier sides for a bit longer. Kisses.'

Bev blows one to Beau and winks at Hannibal. They see here dialling and then holding the phone to her ear as she goes out the double doors at the end of the corridor. A few minutes later they can look down from the window and see Bev walking up and down in the small scrubby garden the hospital sports. She's on the cell for almost fifteen minutes. When she comes in she's a little cold and quite a lot angry.

'Hey guys' she walks up to Beau and kisses him hard, then she goes to Hannibal and hugs him equally hard, he's moderately relieved not to have been kissed, 'Beverly?'

'You are going to love this. And what's so crap is we still should say yes to them doing the search. Gods. I don't often really loathe someone. But you know I can make an exception. I have two words for you'

she leaves a pause and then both Beau and Hannibal say simultaneously 'Abigail Hobbs?'

'You betcha! I talked to Alana. Who is now off my Christmas card list. Apparently Miss Hobbs is going for the "injured party I've always been a bit scared of Dr Lecter and maybe he's trying to set Dr Graham up if not me" thing. Alana said she didn't believe it but was a bit worried that Will's view of things might be compromised because he's been ill, and he might

not have known if he was being manipulated. So we're caught. If we say no then Hannibal's exerting undue influence and might have planted evidence, if we say yes it doesn't deal with the influence thing because Will has been ill, and how did the little bitch know that, Alana didn't tell her, she promises, and for bonus fucks sake Abigail or her cousin might still have planted evidence which is going to incriminate either Will or Hannibal or both of them. Fuck. She's clever'

'But surely Jack will see that it could indeed be a plant, but by her?'

'First rule of investigation "follow the fucking evidence" it doesn't lie'

'Except when it does'

'Beau, you're totally right. But it's not a hard sell. If we've got a head to head between Hannibal and Abigail or even Will and Abigail, who is going to look like the victim? Juries are just people and people have preconceived ideas of what victims and villains look like'

'You think it could go that far?' Beau looks alarmed now

'I honestly don't know. I just think we keep thinking she's done and then it turns out she totally isn't. She's really clever. And she's having a lot of fun too'

Hannibal looks resigned. At every turn she's outwitted him. He's been too focussed on Will to avoid the worst of her machinations. And now if he acts against her it will only serve to underline her own position. There must be something. But right this moment he can't see it.

'Let's ask Will about the search, we should wake him up to enjoy this confectionary. Beverly it has a straw is that going to undermine your food related disaster picture strategy?'

'Hannibal, I haven't told you this. But I love you. I hope you know that.'

Hannibal is surprisingly affected by Beverly's admission

'Thank you. That's. That's very kind of you. I'm very fond of you too'

'Sweet'

.....

'Mr Boyle, good to see you sitting up again. You recovering now?'

'Don't know why you care. Double count of murder? You've got to be joking right? Cassie was my fucking sister. They took her lungs whilst she was still using them! Bitch'

'Alright. Enough of that. We've only got a few questions right now. Can you look at these pictures for me, tell me if you recognise any of them'

'That's Dr Graham I think. I saw a picture of him. I've never met him. That's Dr Bloom, she's Abigail's shrink. Bit wet. But nice I guess. Haven't met her, Abigail talks about her. That's Dr Lecter, he's another shrink. He phoned the house. Told Garrett you were coming. He's a

psycho. Don't know him, or him. That's the woman with the dog pyjamas, she looks hotter here. Don't know her. Don't know her. Done'

He hands the pictures back to Jack 'you want to know anything else?'

'Why do you say that about Dr Lecter?'

'Him. Weirdo isn't he. Nasty. Bad habits. Em says he's tricky. And Em should know. He's a bastard too. Setting his friend up isn't he? His toy boy. Funny. Good luck with that mate.'

Nick shrugs,

'So you think he's involved in some way?'

'With Cassie and Marissa? For sure. Don't know about the others. Stands to reason though. He must have been friends with Abigail's dad. Ringing him like that to let him know.'

'I see. Ok. I'm going to leave this here for now. You're still under arrest, being detained. It'd be better for you if you don't talk to anyone about the case'

'Whatever. Sure. Can't make it better can it?'

.....

'Hello Dr Lecter? How's Dr Graham then. Will you give him this?'

Freddie Lounds hands Hannibal a rather nice, rather large fruit basket, she struggles to lift it

'Thank you Ms Lounds. I admit I'm surprised to see you here. Would you like to come inside. Have a tea or coffee?'

'Really? That's err nice of you. Is this your place. I meant to ask you last time.'

'No. It belongs to a friend. She's not here at present, but you can meet my sister.'

'Your sister? Oh'

shit! She should have thought of something like that, God Abigail Hobbs was a scheming little monster. If she was a bit older maybe she'd offer her a job or something.

'Ms Lounds, I should tell you Mischa has had some challenges in her life, I'd be grateful if you're a little compassionate in your dealings with her, she doesn't always immediately grasp if someone is being sarcastic. You're very dry, so she may be a bit bewildered'

'Ok. Sure. I can be nice. Don't worry. I have to be in this line of things'

'I'm sure, do come in'

'Hannibal? Is that you? How's Will? Is he, oh. I'm so sorry I didn't know you had someone with you. Hello. I'm Mischa. I expect Hannibal told you. Shall I put the kettle on? Biscuits, Hannibal?'

'Lovely, thank you. Ms Lounds first do take your shoes off, and come into the sitting room, please make yourself comfortable. I know zaisu take a bit of getting used to. Would you like a cushion? Or pillow? Are you alright?'

'Yes, thank you. This is very nice. I understand the koi print now'

'Clever of you. Good. What can I do for you? I can't believe you drove all the way here to bring fruit for Will, though this is an especially nice selection.'

'I guess you'll know this. They're going to search the house in Wolf Trap. Anything you want to say about that?'

'Thank you Mischa, would you like to join us? If Ms Lounds doesn't mind?'

'Of course not, that'd be nice. Call me Freddie'

'Oh! Do you write that fun crime blog. I do like your writing. You're so incisive. We've talked about your work very often'

'Have you? Really? Err, thank you'

'Oh not at all, it's a pleasure to be able to thank those who cheer us up'

'I guess. Sure. So. Err. The house search?'

'Hannibal is this about Will's house?'

Both Hannibal and Freddie nod, Hannibal smiles as he passes tea to Freddie and then pours both him and Mischa a cup too

'Oh good. Do you know anything interesting? Did they find anything? I rather hope they did?'

'Uhm. They found some materials in Dr Graham's flies. That err came from some of the victims'

'Did they! So they think Will did it? Or that Hannibal planted the evidence to make Will look guilty? That would be awful.'

'I think they don't know what to think. I know you were here when Cassie died Dr Lecter. But it does seem a bit unlikely. What do you think?'

'I think Miss Hobbs is very clever. She has utterly outwitted me.'

'Gosh Hannibal, she must be brilliant. I've never heard you say anything like that before. Of course Will is very clever too, do you know him at all Freddie?'

'We've met a bit. I don't think I'm his favourite person.'

'Really? He's awfully nice. And very forgiving. You've only got to be a bit sorry and he just melts. I do love him. We're very lucky'

'Lucky?'

'To have Will. Don't you think Hannibal? Freddie?'

Freddie has the overwhelming feeling that she is utterly and completely out of her depth. Fucking hell total honesty is a bit terrifying! And the way Hannibal looks at his sister, just plain fond friendly love. God, she'd kill for a bit of something like that. And yeah, that's he's so sweet with her is kind of hot too, yeah alright, shut up.

'I think true devotion is a rare commodity these days' Freddie tries

'I think that's the difficulty really. Devotion isn't a commodity. You either give it or you don't. Receive it or you don't. It can't be bartered, it isn't really an exchange. There is the devoted and the devotee. Of course it can be mutual. But that's different. You can see that with Hannibal and Will.'

Hannibal smiles at her again as she reaches out to take his hand

'It's a beautiful thing. I do like to see it. Do you have people you love Ms Lounds? I think you're someone who people could feel very strongly about'

'I think that's true. I'm not sure what they feel is love though' she laughs a little bitterly

'Oh. I'm sorry. You live near Baltimore don't you? Maybe you'd come and see me. We could be friends. I need more friends. I'm a bit shy. But I think you'd be alright with that?'

Freddie is amazed to find herself agreeing 'sure, we could, I dunno, do stuff. Go shopping'

'Really? I'd love that. You're very pretty. I love your hair. And I always think you're so stylish'

Freddie realises she's just smiling and smiling. Fuck me, the Lecter siblings are something else, get back on track Lounds.

'Thank you. That's really nice of you. So you're ok with the house then? What does Dr Graham say?'

'I think he is convinced that the FBI knows how to carry out a thorough and complete investigation. We're all optimistic this will be no different. I hope with your efforts too there's a chance they might be. If you wait a little longer you could meet Will's father. He's here as well. He's currently seeing Agent Katz, I think you've met'

'Cook for Katz? Bloody hell! With Graham's dad! Errr. Sorry. I didn't know that'

'Astounding. I don't think I've ever known something you didn't already know, even since Dr Zeller found newer playmates'

'You know about that then?'

Hannibal smiles. Mischa looks at them both, she semi whispers to her brother 'was Ms Lounds sleeping with Dr Zeller to get information out of him?'

Freddie looks aghast 'err yes. My bad. Sorry. I didn't know you knew that. Guess we should just tell each other direct! Save all the complications. I didn't know Abigail would plant stuff at your place though. I am sorry about that. I'd have kept out of it I'd known'

'Would you have told me?'

'Honestly?'

'If possible'

Ok, that's fair enough 'I might have done. I can't say for sure. Maybe. My track record with her isn't great'

'It is the same for all of us'

They hear the front door go and Bev and Beau drop their shoes and come into the room

'Wow. Freddie Lounds. This is a bit of a surprise. Did you bring the fruit? Wow. Awesome. Can I have an apple?'

'Beverly, there are apples in the store if you want one' Hannibal gestures to the kitchen,

'Nah, I want to steal one of Will's'

Mischa leans over to Freddie and says conspiratorially 'Beverly is Will's lady bro. She's my friend too. If Will wasn't ill this would be a lovely holiday' she sighs and smiles and picks up Freddie's spare hand.

Freddie looks at Bev slightly desperately who gives her the 'yeah. Let's see you fuck with Mischa babe. That won't end well!' look.

'Ms Lounds let me introduce Beau Graham, this is Will's father. Ms Lounds is a journalist. She's the author behind Tattlecrime'

Beau smiles and sticks out his hand, fortunately it means Mischa has to let go, she shakes his hand as he says 'well I've heard a lot about you, and what you write, read a lot of what you write, keeps me up to date when I'm out of town, what my boy is doing. Useful. Let's me know what he's dealing with. Gotta be grateful for that.'

Freddie glances at Bev, and signals "is this on the up and up?" And "is everyone crazy here?" or "is this just me?" And even "Beverly. Help. Please"

'Alright Freddie. Are you just the greengrocer or is there a point?'

'She wondered how we might feel about Wolf Trap. They found evidence in the flies'

'Will's flies? That's just rude. Oh sorry you mean the fishing kind, right. Oh?'

'Yeah, the last few victims of the Shrike and the two girls'

'Ok. Well that's a whole new league we're playing in now. Freddie?'

'Beverly?'

'Welcome to the Super Bowl

The Pendulum

Chapter Summary

And where does the evidence point? And other nasty questions.

Freddie knocks quietly on the door and pushes it open, she is mildly embarrassed to find Hannibal sitting on the bed, propped against the pillows with Will leaning back against him, asleep.

'Hello Ms Lounds, did you hope to speak to Will? He'll probably wake up in about twenty minutes or so. Will I do for the time being?'

'Sorry. I thought it was sufficiently late I wouldn't interrupt anyone'

'Come in, have a seat. There's coffee in that flask if you'd like some. I'm expecting Jimmy Price and Brian Zeller at some point tonight. They had to wait until the end of the working day, but should be here in about an hour. I don't know if you'll want to see Dr Zeller?'

'He probably wouldn't want to see me'

Hannibal smiles sadly at her 'that may be so. So have a seat and a cup. I would like to thank you for your kindness to Mischa. She was very warmed by it. If you really would meet her in Baltimore that would be wonderful for her. I'm sure we could find a little clothing allowance to help that along.'

'You don't have to. I'd do it for her'

'Even kinder then. But she'd enjoy it too, buying you something? Perhaps you might indulge her a little more?'

'Dr Lecter, sorry, alright then, Hannibal' he smiles 'I'm going to be more frank than I usually am. I don't get it. You're always polite and nice and encouraging. Why? What's with that? I can't be to your taste. It's confusing'

'Dear Ms Lounds, please, it affords me some pleasure. Surely you don't object to that? Sometimes it is a joy to give the person the one thing they never get from anyone else'

'Is it like that with him' she lifts her chin to indicate Will

'Indubitably. People treat Will like fragile porcelain, he's more robust than terracotta'

'Yeah, right, thanks, made from dirt I am, real earthy'

'And lo, the creature awakes'

'Less of the Frankenstein's monster please'

'More of a Golem?'

'I dunno, what scrip did you put in my head?'

'Ahh, I can whisper into the chrysalis, but I could never predict what you might become'

'Yeah all right Ovid. Hello Freddie. Hannibal says you brought the fruit. Thanks. That's nice of you. Bev ate all the apples'

'A daughter of Eve?'

'Are we back to earth again?'

Freddie frowns, Will smiles tiredly 'Eve's husband, Adam? the word in Genesis is from the Hebrew Adamah, it means earth'

She nods, remembering what Mischa said. She usually has the minimum of interaction with Will Graham. Maybe he's interesting after all. Smart even. He's definitely weird. But everyone she's spoken to who knows him likes him. Even his dad. So. Here they are three very smart people. Outwitted by a seventeen year old.

'How are you feeling Dr Graham?'

'Call me Will, you may as well. The medication is helping. The staff here are great. Lots of my friends are visiting. I've got time away from dead bodies. If it wasn't for the encephalitis I'd say this was a stellar vacation'

Freddie smiles 'that was what Mischa said too. She likes you. She's nice.'

'She is. And I like her too. I've hit the jackpot with Hannibal. I even like his family. He likes the ones he's met of mine. Namely my dad who is great. Have you met him yet?'

'I have. I liked him too. It seems you're all very likeable'

'You sound surprised?'

'I think I am. Look I don't actually spend much time with people, not properly. You know? There's always an angle? Shit why am I telling you this?'

'Because we asked?'

'Yeah. But I don't know what you want from me?'

'Nothing. You came here. Glad about the fruit though. Thanks. Might fall asleep'

And he's gone. Hannibal strokes his head and side of his face. It's so warm and affectionate Freddie has a moment of real envy. Not just because it's the Doc (shut up, only a little bit)

just because it's so nice. And most people get scared around her. Scared and clam up. Always trying to work out her angle or a way to work theirs. This is just. Alright.

'Can I eat a banana?'

'I hope you will'

.....

'Is she staying up here?' Brian looks just a little worried,

'In the Bed and Breakfast she stayed in last time, it belongs to friends of mine. Apparently they rather liked her'

'Amazing? What, did she wonder what they'd do to her?' Jimmy grins, Will told him about the set up,

'She did ask about zombies and cannibals and Stephen King' Hannibal smiles at the memory. That had been a very successful tease.

'Is your friend really ok with us staying as well, it must be a full house now'

'Mischa and Chiyoh have both gone to our friend Indigo, you'll meet them tomorrow. Mischa is my sister'

'Bev said, it'll be nice to meet her. Is she like you?'

'In many ways, and not at all. Tell me what you think later'

'Are Bev and Beau at the cabin now?'

'Yes. Beau had to phone Will's siblings to let them know'

'Will they come out?'

'They're not close. So I doubt it. But family is a peculiar business'

They all make family faces. Hannibal's is much less strained than it has ever been. Even the prospect of Freddie Lounds finding out Mischa's backstory is of less concern than he had thought it might be. Why had he worried before? Only because of Will. He should have had more faith.

Will opens his eyes again 'shit, these meds are really strong, I'm hallucinating my friends and not Garrett Jacob Hobbs' he smiles broadly 'hey. Science bros. nice. Have some fruit. There's lots. It was from Freddie Lounds, did Hannibal say. She brought me fruit. My life is so odd. Drive up ok?'

'Alright Will. I like that you got a life threatening disease to make us have a mini break. Sweet of you. Thoughtful.'

'Jimmy. Of course. Any time. Just say. Now I know the symptoms I can fake it real good, Brian, mate, thanks'

The three of them grin foolishly 'I brought that shark thing Bev likes and the two sequels, we could watch them tomorrow if you like?'

'Excellent. Trash tv. I'm good for it. Maybe gourmet pizza too? And popcorn? If someone doesn't get all picky'

'Popcorn is perfectly fine if it is made properly. I will think about how to make the pizza a better idea'

'Gotta be able to pick it up with my hands Hannibal. No fine motor skills yet. You could just feed it to me though. Will you peel me a grape too? I want to do the whole Roman toga thing'

'You are incorrigible'

'Yeah. Hey guys get Hannibal to show you the brain on fire picture. It's awesome. You should get some sleep soon I'm going to konk out any'

.....

In the cabin it's now Beau and Bev, Hannibal, Brian and Jimmy. The news from a Wolf Trap isn't great.

'They found human remains from six victims in eight of the flies. Hair, teeth, bit of intestine, vein, you get the idea. One of them has blood on the tip too, like someone caught themselves when they made it, or used it'

'Oh. But we all made flies that weekend at Will's, the tipi weekend. If they added material to an existent fly, the blood could belong to any of us'

'I'd forgotten that. Shit. Someone needs to tell Krendler. Beau, can Will tell who made a fly, if it isn't one of his'

'Sure, he probably knows who made all of them. But what worries me is will anyone believe him?'

And there's the rub. They're caught on the devil's fork again. If he's been influenced either because he's been ill or because he's in love then he might lie if the flies are incriminating, if he hasn't been influenced the flies still might be incriminating, and because he's been ill he still might not be believed. Either way.

'Do we ask Will?'

'I think we ask him, but not labour the point, Beau are you content with that? Shall we do so tomorrow?'

'Yeah, let's just have the two of us ask. Alright with everyone else?'

There are nods all round. Hannibal gets out the brandy and whisky and everyone ensures they have a finger or two of darkness to help them along. They sit round for the next hour or so. No one quite wanting to be the first to leave this circle of support. And maybe accountability too. After all they are all trusting each other in this.

.....

'Will, lad. Tell me about your flies? Got any on the go? Have you used the ones we made?'

'The flies? Is this about the evidence?'

'Could you try and be a bit less sharp. Your brain's supposed to be on half speed you know. Yeah it is. Sorry.'

'It's ok. At present all the flies in the house were made by me. The ones we made that weekend are all being mounted, in a shadow box. I thought it'd be a nice memorial. Oh. Hang on, one of them was made by Hannibal. We made it over Christmas. To hang on the little tree thing. He got blood on it. Tested how sharp it was. Idiot.'

'Are you speaking of me? Here I've brought you breakfast. Do you deserve it? Why am I being impugned?'

'Dad asked about the flies. They're all mine except the Christmas one you made. The rest are at Val's, Jean-Pierre is mounting them'

'Oh. Yes. I caught my thumb on it. Oh. That's not so good' Hannibal glances at Beau

'Dad had to tell me. I guessed. What did they find?'

'Remains from six victims in eight flies. One of them with blood on the end'

'Ok. So they added to my flies. And yours. Just peachy. Have you told Jack?'

'We wanted to find out if the flies were likely to be yours or not, I said you'd be able to tell'

'Yeah dad. I definitely could. They'll have to get a fly fisherman to back my story up. One who ties too. Shall I phone Agent Krendler? Or do we wait?'

'I find myself torn. Maybe we should contact them both. And be as honest as we can be. They must know we will have heard some of the details by now?'

'Sure. Freddie's not put it up though'

'It would be unfair to rely on her not to'

.....

'Brian'

'Freddie'

'You ok?'

'Yes, you?'

'Buy you a coffee?'

'Ok. Thanks'

'Sit over here?'

'Sure'

'Sorry'

'Ok. Why now?'

'The Will effect?'

Brian laughs 'ok, I'll take it. That's good. You really ok?'

'Bit rough'

'Work?'

'Abigail'

'Fucked you over too?'

'I was about to say like you wouldn't believe'

'But I would. I was'

'Yes. Sorry. Again'

'It was a while ago'

'I was a bitch'

'And I was a shit'

'Quits?'

'Yeah. Good coffee'

'Yeah. Thanks Z'

'I can actually say you're welcome. Will effect! Nice'

'See you?'

'Sure. Around'

'Good enough'

.....

Mischa watches as Freddie and Brian get up and leave the coffee shop. They separate at the door with an awkward little hug. Brian sees her and waves and comes over

'Was that alright? I think she hurt you before?'

'It was ok. She bought the coffee. Apologised even. Better than it was'

'Oh good. I'm waiting for Chiyoh. Would you like an ice cream?'

'It's the beginning of January. There's snow on the ground'

'Yes. You can be cold inside and out, but with fruit'

'I think I'll pass. Thanks for the offer. I'm going to see Will later. What about you?'

'I'm going to help Hannibal cook for this evening. The doctor is letting Will out of the hospital for three hours, just to see how he manages. He has to bring his drip and other things, but it's worth it'

'Yeah. Great. Ok. See you later on then'

.....

'Hannibal?'

'Will?'

'I miss you'

'I know love. And I you'

'You know what I mean don't you'

Hannibal looks at him with such dry lust and possession that Will has to swallow his own desperation.

'Fuck'

'Not yet I'm afraid'

'Have you asked?'

'I have done some research'

'When?'

'Maybe another week. If you continue well on the medication'

'Nothing?'

'Nothing that overstimulates your brain'

'Fuck'

'Including that'

'How can you bear it?'

'With difficulty'

'Glad it's not just me, can't I even get myself off? Or watch you?'

Hannibal looks at the door.

'Let's see how you do this evening, if the three hours don't wear you out then we might manage a little light something'

'Gods. I'm half hard now'

'Which half?'

'Is that an encephalitis joke?'

'Possibly'

'That's not funny. Damn. I'm losing it. Shit that was your intention wasn't it. You're such a beast'

'Always. Where you are concerned'

'Just shut up already, my head hurts again'

Hannibal smiles at him and then returns to his book.

'Aren't you going to talk to me?'

'Why don't you try and sleep again. Brian and Jimmy will be here shortly. I'm going to cook this afternoon. They'll bring you this evening. Unless you want me to come?'

'I like it when you carry me'

'I'll certainly carry you from their car'

'Alright then. Still want to fuck you'

Hannibal smiles and doesn't look up from his book

'Beast'

.....

Two weeks later.....

'I don't want to go back. I don't want to. Don't make me'

'My darling, I'm sorry. I won't drop you. Please Will'

'Alright then. God. How much longer?'

'Another week. Then we can go home. Then maybe a few weeks mostly indoors and we shall step up your activity bit by bit over that time'

'Am I going to come to you? Or should I stay in Wolf Trap? Dad said he'd come back to help'

'Think about what you'd like. I'll endeavour to fit round your preferences'

'I'm such a horrible patient'

'You're not a patient patient'

'Has Jack called you again?'

'Yes. Let's get you into the car, mind your head'

'Yeah, yeah mind my bloody head. What did Jack say?'

'That we were very sensible to tell him about the flies. The lab team had to give sworn affidavits. Someone interviewed Val and Jean-Pierre, they confirmed the story, showed them the flies. It was my blood. Several of the Christmas photos had the fly tree in the background, they were able to blow the images up. At least one of them they can tell was altered after the picture was taken. Did you take them down that night when you were home?'

'No. It was still up. I'd have noticed otherwise. I thought we'd be back on the 3rd, still holiday enough to take it down then. Not even twelfth night.'

'So, you put them up on Christmas Eve? We were there Christmas Day, and in Baltimore over night. And you didn't go home again until the 30th December? No. wait. You were there on the 28th during the day. With Beau and Beverly, they stayed there that night. And Abigail Hobbs and Matthew Brown were scooped up in the early hours of the 29th. So really we're talking about the night of the 25th, the 26th at any time, the 27th, and then there's somewhere there from the the 28th off and on until the 31st. But by the 29th both Hobbs and Brown are detained. It's very tight'

'Nicholas Boyle woke up Christmas day'

'You think we shouldn't discount him?'

'Jack says he's a bit all over the place. Probably some PTSD.'

'I see. Three nights and two days. But Christmas and St Stephen's day? They couldn't guarantee we wouldn't be there'

'They might have thought I would be. If they knew about the break up'

'Ah. Yes. So we may be thinking of sometime during those three or, at a stretch, four nights. Late. After you were asleep. If they have also known you've been ill?'

'Shit. They might have worked out a way to get in when they did the bevergram photos'

'They might'

'I'll tell Jack the timeline. He won't like it either.'

'Will. I was not involved in the murder of those two girls. I did not alter your flies, or try to place evidence that would incriminate you in your house'

'Hannibal! You don't even need to say it! Oh my gods. I would never even begin to think it'

'I thought you deserved to hear it stated clearly'

'I didn't think you'd planted evidence in your own house or car either!'

'Will. Do you remember what the mountain men said? That there was a storm coming. That things would be not as they seemed? I'm beginning to be afraid they are right. This has a bad taste to it'

'Ok. When we get back. Please may I stay with you. If there's going to be a shit creek, I'd rather paddle it with you

The rescuer

Chapter Summary

Someone from the past come to fish.

Guest appearance by Rustin Cohle from True Detective. Because Will Graham does have a type after all.

Chapter Notes

Little bit of sexy times in this chapter. Probably not suited to the person on the bus reading over your shoulder. Depending on the bus. Or the person. Or your shoulder.

Three more days, three more days, Three. More. Days. And then they can go home. Or at least back to Baltimore. Good enough. Will is almost bored out of his mind. Still, that's better than being just out of his mind, or consumed by it. Hannibal is off doing something or other with Indigo's mother. Adelaide isn't first language Japanese, but she learnt from her husband so she's almost fluent. They'll happily prattle away all afternoon.

Will's opted to stay in the hospital for the day. In theory he could be at the cabin but he thinks he might have slightly overdone it so he's gone for a day of rest and trash TV. He's still mulling over the issue with the flies. And what Hannibal said last week about the mountain men. There's a knock on the door

'Come on in, I'm awake and decent, well, awake anyway. Well fuck me sideways! Rust! Dear gods in any heaven how come you're here?'

'Spoke to your father. Seems you're having trouble sleeping. Pendulum swinging close?'

'At the moment? Yes. Close. Can see its sharpness even'

'That'll be the light. Sharpens everything. How's the head?'

'Clearing up'

'That's good. For you. What about the cases? You working?'

'Back home, sure. Here I'm just twiddling my toes and crossing my fingers'

'You don't believe in luck'

'You're right. I don't. There's some serious shit going on'

'In it? Or smelling it?'

'Maybe both. Do you want coffee or something, I've got a card thing?'

'Brought beer. You allowed?'

'No. not at all. Maybe a sip?'

'Too cold for outside. Can't smoke in here right?'

'True. I could wrap up, get a wheelchair?'

'Ok good. I'm not wild about hospitals'

'Of course. Memories'

'Some are ok. Sorted it with Marty'

'He alright?'

'He's fine. Thinking about local politics if you can believe that'

'People incapable of guilt usually do have a good time?'

'I still thinks that's true. I'll tell him you said hi. I heard about the mountain thing. Got more to say about that?'

'I think there's some very peculiar things going on. Dad tell you about the evidence and the girl?'

'He did. What's your take? Wait, let's get the chair and get out of here first'

Rust and Will spend the next ten minutes getting everything together so Will can extricate himself from the bed. Will's known Rust for years, since Will was on the police down in New Orleans. They met through a case and hit it off. Rust had been off the force for a bit then. Had a bad one that wouldn't go away, ended up with him gutted in a hospital.

Marty had been his partner on the force, one of those hate hate relationships that finally became something else. Will had had a thing for Rust, but back then Rust thought he was bad for everyone. Will looks him over, despite the dissipation he is still a fine man. Almost the total opposite of Hannibal except for the wit and sharp observation and tendency to metaphor. Yeah, yeah, Will's got a type. Thanks. It'll be the death of him.

'Why the haori?'

'Oh. Yeah. The place we use here is owned by a Japanese friend of my partner, it's become a bit of a thing.'

'You saying partner now. Very metrosexual of you?'

'Bastard. Yeah. What else can I say?'

'Good enough. Don't fuss'

'I'm all about the fuss'

'Yeah. Hasn't totally changed you then. The brain melting illness?'

'Not totally'

'You got enough distance to be able to properly see what's going on?'

'I don't know. I thought I definitely did, but now? I'm doubting what I thought I knew'

'Your dad said the girl is a schemer. Long vision?'

'I thought we'd got her. But she's slippery. Now whichever way I look there's a pit opening up and we're being crowded towards it'

'Have you looked into the pit? Seen what's there?'

'No. you're right. I haven't. Help me?'

'Give me the bones, the friable shape of it'

'We got her wrong from the start. She almost certainly orchestrated the deaths of all the Shrike victims. Got her father killed and blamed, in the best bit of sleight of hand I've ever seen. She almost certainly killed two of her friends, who had been involved, either for the hell of it, to throw us off, or because they were a threat. She almost killed a third right in front of us. He's recovering now, but effectively he's ignoring that bit and denying the rest, or at least denying sole responsibility. Her cousin has been stalking me and some of the others off and on, he took some photos and trashed us in the media. The girl planted evidence at Hannibal's house and in his car, and one of them planted evidence at my house. She's deflected everything we've thrown at her and is now casting blame'

'Neatly done. That's a pretty present all gift wrapped and tied up ready for some prosecuting council. And a jury'

'No shit. She's seventeen, looks about twelve, and can turn on the tears in an instant'

'You need a saw or a safety net'

'Go on?'

'If it's a breaking limb you can either take it off ahead of the break, control the descent, might hurt some but less if you're ready for it. Or you need a net, ready when it breaks, if you can't anticipate it'

'I can see both of those. If this was a lecture series she'd be the best example of a long con I've ever seen'

'What's her end game?'

'I don't really know. That's part of it. I can see the how and the what and even the when sometimes but the why is almost impossible. I can't get her design at all. None of the bodies or the evidence tell us why. She doesn't tell us why.'

'Because she can?'

'Sure, there's always a bit of power stuff going on. Power, love, money, status. The rule of four'

'Lords of mis-rule. What's the crucial element right now'

'Right now she's effectively set us up that either Hannibal is involved and is trying to incriminate me, or just possibly vice versa.'

'Discounting the second, any chance of the first?'

Will looks at him. Of course none of the others would dream of asking him this. Except possibly Jack or Alana, but for quite different reasons, including from each other. Rust he trusts to ask for purer intents. Which tells him something about how embroiled they all are in the case, in the situation.

'Fuck, Rust. I'm going to say 99.9% certain not. But the shit bit of my brain that says that little 0.1% isn't sure is because I've fucking had encephalitis. So I have to allow for it. I hate myself for even thinking it'

'He know?'

'Yes. We talked about it. He's pretty pragmatic. Actually that's not right he's totally a romantic, but he practices being a pragmatist.'

'A romantic would think the 0.1% was just another dragon to slay for their beloved'

'Yes. You're right. That might be Hannibal's take actually. Will you stay on to meet him?'

'Sure. You're dad likes him. That's not without meaning. I'm not stopping overnight. Got somewhere to be, back through in a few. You be here then?'

'No. going home in three days. Come to Baltimore, or Wolf Trap. We could go fishing'

'Ok. Which kind?'

'It's good to see you Rust'

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'I can see why you like him'

'Yeah? I wasn't sure if you would'

'He's interesting. Very astute. His idea of the saw and the net, alerts me that we have not been very strategic in all this'

'We've been re-active. It's not surprising you know. Hard to be otherwise'

'Indeed. As you are on the mend and we can both begin to think of other things perhaps we might also do some strategising. Exercise your mind as well as the rest of you'

'Tell me sex is back on the menu. Please'

'I asked your doctor'

'Really? Oh. You wanted a second opinion didn't you? In case of bias'

'Not so impossible to imagine. He was a little embarrassed. If I was feeling unkind I would describe him as struggling somewhat with finding an appropriate vocabulary'

'You should have asked when I was there. I'd have loved to see it. Did he go really red?'

'Not as fetching as your tomato impression'

'Ok. What did he say?'

'You are permitted, at this point, the stimulation of being on the receiving end, if you remain prone. Or of being orally stimulated if you can remain relatively still. He is anxious about you being over-excited'

'He actually said most of that didn't he, like that?'

'He did. He managed eye contact throughout. I was quite impressed'

'Have you asked Donald?'

'That was even more amusing. His response was "oh, have at it. If he's ill again at least he'll be happy"'

Will is startled into a laugh by this 'that's great! He's gone up in my estimation'

'In mine too. Were you ever with Rust? He gave off the whiff of proprietary interest'

'Nah. I wanted to at one point. Then he stayed with me for a bit when he was between dead end jobs. Then the case took over and he was gone. Stayed friends in a distant kind of way. He came to Wolf Trap once, just after I moved in. He was doing bounty hunter stuff, wanted some insight'

'So. Not a previous suitor?'

'Gods, you're adorable. No. I like him. He's a friend, you remember, he asked to be friends, he stayed a friend. He likes you, certainly respects you'

'How do you know?'

'He didn't try to smoke in here'

Hannibal smiles. He liked Rust, a bright, smart, elusive man. He might have been beautiful once. A certain ascetic aesthetic. And if Rust is an old friend he might be concerned for Will. Given the mess.

'Is he going to offer assistance?'

'He's going to swing by once we're back home. He talked about going fishing'

'I'm glad you're coming to me. Thank you Will. I find it reassuring. And it means we will be able to marshal our forces more easily if we're together. Ask Rust if he wants to stay when he comes back. We can fit him and Beau in. I'm assuming he knows Beau?'

'He does. They get on ok. Dad was a bit leery of how much he drinks. He's off the hard stuff now, just beer'

'We should introduce him to Alana'

'Ok. Now that just boggles my brain'

'Shall I take you back to the hospital?'

'Yeah. Ok. I might have overdone it the last few days'

'I think so. How long were you outside with Rust?'

'Damn. You can smell it can't you?'

'Smoke and fresh air. Unmistakeable I'm afraid'

'Gods, I love you so much'

'Will. Come here. Like that. Lean a bit more. There we are'

Hannibal envelops Will against him, sitting on one of the floor chairs. He runs his hands down his sides and kisses Will gently and slowly. Will reaches both arms round his neck and moans quietly as he opens his mouth against Hannibal's. Hannibal hums a little. It vibrates through both of them. He cradles Wills head and kisses slowly down his throat and into the unbuttoned opening of the pyjamas Will is currently wearing.

Will makes a kind of whine and Hannibal pushes down the front of the loose trousers Will is wearing. He reaches in and strokes Will as equally slowly as everything else he has done. Will is already almost hard. He can feel his own erection pushing between the two of them, where Will is pressed tightly against him. It's been too long. And tonight they shouldn't go much further. Though he'd like to. Would like to consume every part of Will. Let him live inside.

He strokes a little more firmly and Will wriggles against him. Oh. They're both close. From just this. 'Will, my love' 'Hannibal, please' he moves his hand a little faster and Will sticks his

tongue and two of his fingers as far as he can into Hannibal's mouth. And they both come. Will almost crying with relief, Hannibal moaning his name again and then again. They rock together, through the aftershocks and just hold on, tight.

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'They looked very pleased with the gifts. Thanks for helping me choose'

'Not at all, the staff have been excellent'

'Lucky weren't we?'

'In many ways. There's Brian' Hannibal waves at Brian coming across the road towards them

'Hey. Alright? Thanks for doing this. Did you come by train?'

'Nah. Freddie gave me a lift. I know. She's got someone to interview further up the coast. Some coastal smuggling thing. I didn't ask'

'How's it working out?'

'Just being friends? Surprisingly well. We don't talk work. Or mine at least. She talks about hers any time I see her. Which isn't that often. Just twice before today. But it's kind of good we got the sex out of the way before. She's alright really. Well. Sort of'

'Hannibal likes her'

'Do you? I didn't know that. Ok.'

'We've parked by the bar, we thought maybe something to eat and then I'll drive for the first two or three hours. Would that suit you?'

'Sounds great. I love that I get to drive the Bentley. How did you get it back up here? Oh, did Chiyoh drive it back, after it was released from evidence? They didn't trash it did they?'

'She did. Did Mischa tell you? She said she had coffee with you when she went out with Freddie'

'Yeah. Mischa brings out the best in Freddie. She told us. You know. It actually made Freddie cry. Unbelievable. Mischa got her a hat. It's ridiculous. Freddie cried about that too, after. Said no one's bought her a present in years. I managed not to point out that there was a reason for that'

'You're too kind. What shall we have to eat? Julia, hello, anything especially good today?'

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'Knock knock, can I come in Jack?'

'Will hello. I didn't know you were back yet, come in and sit'

'Not for work. Sorry. Back in Baltimore. Thought I'd pop my head in. I can't drive yet. Anything you want me to read though. I can do that, sort of quietly.'

'What do the doctors say'

'Dr Sutcliffe says I can do consulting, and maybe a field trip in a few weeks, if one comes up. But any hint of a temperature I'm back to bed rest. Dr Lecter says nothing I'd want to repeat in company! But he knows I'm here. I'm not sneaking around'

'How are the drugs?'

'Ok. Little bit odd. I forget things. But then I was with the encephalitis so it's hard for other people to know the difference. Can't drink anything though, alcohol I mean. I'm supposed to drink a lot of other stuff, a lot of it disgusting'

'Mouth feel like a carpet? It's what Bella says'

'Definitely. Say hi, would she like a visit or to come to me?'

'I'll ask. Paul says he's looked at the timeline. He agrees it is tight, but he also thinks it's possible. Abigail is being Abigail. Matthew Brown has been released. He was only being kept on the resist. Nothing to hold him on. No prints inside your house. Sorry'

'I didn't expect there to be. She's teflon isn't she? Amazing'

'Yeah, she is. We're at a kind of stalemate. Hannibal got anything to say about It?'

'I think he's genuinely surprised we've been backed into a corner on this. He usually ahead of the game. So he's trying to re-group. It did occur to me that he's the most vulnerable in this situation'

'Really? How do you work that one out?'

'Of all of us, he's the one with the least connection to law enforcement. So, he's possibly the least credible in a legal or judicial context. Only Alana has known him for any length of time. None of us can say very much about him before the autumn last year; his habits, his friends, his activities. I've met some of the people he knows, some for a long time, but hey, he's a relatively insular man. Or he was. You know about Mischa? So there's that in the background which makes him vulnerable. Explains his reserve, but also makes him more likely to be something of an unknown quantity. He's European by birth, so he's another kind of outsider. He didn't grow up here, so there's stuff outside his experience. I'm not saying he's naive, he's just got different frames of reference. And he's odd. The cooking, the suits, the house, the ideolect, the car, me. None of it screams just your every day joe. I can imagine in this situation most people would look at it and think I was the vulnerable one. But I'm not. And he is'

'You've given this a lot of thought'

'Now my brain's working again'

'You realise all this counts for him and against him?'

'No shit. I can see it all going either way. There's evidence now. And it's Abigail versus Hannibal on who put what where. Put the pair of them on the stand and what do you see?'

Jack smiles wearily 'we both know. Your friend dropped by, Cohle? He asked if we'd mind him snooping a bit. I said what I didn't know couldn't hurt me? You feel it?'

'I understand Jack. Rust was good police. He's my friend but he's also honest. If he finds some shit he won't let me get in the way. Good enough?'

'Like I said. I know nothing. Maybe he and I could meet over dinner at your place? If he catches any fish'

Will smiles and says slowly 'he's a good fisherman Jack. We've fished together for a long time'

'Let's hope there's a good catch then. Feed all of us'

And the saved

Chapter Summary

Rust does some investigating, Will and Hannibal come back to Baltimore. Alana opts for her professional over her personal relationships. There's a small thank you dinner.

It's much better to read the thing, I'm so bad at summaries. I wrote stuff, some of it's ok. The rest doesn't smell like three day old fish. Yay me. And you, for reading.

'Nice of Hannibal to ask us'

'Sure. Of course. It's not the full performance. I'm not up to it yet!'

'Still. It's work for him'

'Yeah. Him and the hands behind the scenes. Otherwise known as me and Mischa. There's been an awful lot of chopping and dicing, and mincing "finer, no finer, shall I do it?" It's been a real bundle of laughs!'

'Will. It's been fine' she giggles 'You're good at some kitchen things. Very good'

Everyone smiles at Mischa. If she can, she will find a nice thing to say about someone. It's why Freddie is at the table tonight too. She and Brian seem to have reached a kind of compromise agreement which extends to everyone else except perhaps Jimmy. He picked up a lot of the pieces last time and offered this when Will asked him if he was ok with Freddie and Brian being friends now

'he's a grown up, he can make his own mistakes if he wants. He pays his bills. Apparently that's all the adult he needs. So I'm keeping my opinion behind my teeth. Anyway he doesn't really like Frederick so it's not like I'd want to double date or anything. Yes I know he's not dating her. I'm just saying'

Will had hugged him then and Jimmy had had a little sniffly moment, still, he and Frederick are both here too.

It's an odd crowd but a good one. It's only three ok, four courses, and only three wines. And it's been labelled as a sort of family dinner. Jack and Bella would be here except Bella is a bit worse right now. Alana and Margot might have been here if she hadn't pissed Bev and Will off completely and Hannibal a little.

Alana had come for afternoon tea. Part of it was to meet Mischa. Part of it to try and ease some of the tensions. It had started badly and gone down hill from there. In retrospect Will wondered if having Bev there too was a mistake.

Alana had been a bit nervous at the start, never the less she got into it quickly 'So it was your brain and not your personality then?'

'Pretty much. We'll have to see how it goes'

'But you feel better?'

'I do. I feel a lot better. Thank you'

'I'm sorry we couldn't come. There was a lot of stuff to work through with Abigail'

'I'm sure. I get it, don't worry.'

'I wasn't entirely sure I'd be welcome'

Mischa had looked at her then with the tiniest frown on her face

'Why wouldn't you be welcome? Your Will's friend, and Hannibal's aren't you? I don't understand'

'I think I upset them both last year. I wasn't very tactful to either of them'

'Oh? What did you say?'

Will looks at Mischa wondering if he can deflect her, Hannibal is in the kitchen right this second otherwise he'd be on this double quick. Anything that upsets Will or Hannibal upsets Mischa even second hand. Sometimes. Or not. It varies. But Alana doesn't know what she's getting into.

'I was a bit worried that Will was demonstrating symptoms of instability'

Will restrains himself, this isn't what Alana said. But if she wants to re-write history he'll see where it goes.

'He had encephalitis. I'm surprised he didn't fall over'

'Of course. You're completely right. He did amazingly'

Mischa narrows her eyes. She might not always get sarcasm. But she knows if she's being condescended to 'what did you say to upset Hannibal?'

Alana pauses, fiddles with her napkin, 'I think I might have implied he was being over-protective or over-zealous about Will, or words to that effect'

'Who had encephalitis at the time, which might be why Hannibal was worried. Did you see the scan? His brain is all lit up, it's very beautiful. It looks like a halo'

'He did. And I have'

'Did you say sorry to Hannibal?'

'Err. I haven't actually'

'But you seem so nice? Oh. You're Abigail Hobbs' psychiatrist aren't you. Hannibal isn't seeing her now. She might have done something very bad. I expect you talk with her a lot'

'I do. It's part of her therapy and hopefully her rehabilitation'

'Does she like you more than Hannibal, if she doesn't want to see him?'

'I don't think it's about liking him. I think she just makes more progress with me'

'I'm sure she does'

There is a somewhat awkward silence then. Mischa carries on looking at Alana with a solemn expression on her face. Will decides to keep quiet. This is interesting. Mischa can get to the core of things by being the kind of person who always speaks truth. It makes her hard to lie to or to bullshit.

'I don't think I quite follow. What do you mean Mischa?'

'Only that Abigail might like you more because you're easier to befriend'

'That might be true. Is there something wrong with that?'

'It's easier to deceive our friends. We know all their weak points'

Alana is about to say something when Hannibal brings the second round of tea and sandwiches back into the room. She smiles up at him. Saved by the Victoria Sandwich and the front door bell chimes. Will hops us to answer them, he hopes it's Beverly.

'Come on in Bev we're in the sitting room. Alana is being Mischa-ed, it's something'

'Has she got the Freddie-Lounds-save-me face on yet?'

They'd laughed about that quite a lot after it happened but credit where it is due Freddie has taken Mischa shopping and to the cinema. They are going to a day-spa next. Beverly is debating whether to go as well. They've fucking asked her.

'Not yet. I think she might be resistant to sweetness and light'

'Hey girl and the other girl'

'Beverly! I'm so glad you've come. Freddie says you might come to the spa. Will you? We can change the day if it doesn't suit you? We're just talking about why Abigail might find it easier to pull the wool over Alana's eyes than Hannibal'

Bev puts on her best "oh this is just great" face. The one which usually has her rifling in her bag for her cell which takes good video, with sound and everything.

'Alana, kitten, I haven't seen you since Jimmy's. Kiss for new year?'

Alana gets up and gives Bev a small hug and buss on her cheek. 'Bit late for new year. Nice to see you though. How's Beau'

'He's a dream. The best. Tea in bed, buys cookies. Remembers to get toilet roll and detergent. And he's not here all the time. Perfect man. And Will's dad so I get all the shit on him. Makes for great jibes'

Alana smiles faintly. Hannibal pours a round of tea and exchanges a smile with Will. He sits back to enjoy the show. Unless Mischa gets upset. Then all bets are off.

'I think Alana is a bit sorry about what she said last year. Are you Alana?'

'A little. Maybe. I'm sorry, both of you'

Will grins at her 'good enough, thanks' he carefully doesn't look at either Hannibal or Beverly.

'Will is very forgiving. Lots of people treated him badly when he was ill, or weren't very kind. But he doesn't hold a grudge. He knows forgiveness means you give up hope of a better past. He helped me see that actually. I didn't forgive myself about papa for a long time. I kept trying to fix it in my mind. Go back and change it. But I can't. So I'm learning to forgive myself. Forgiveness means you can forget something too. Because you don't have to fix it. You can wave it all goodbye'

She waves a hand around airily 'it's awfully nice to be able to forget. Will's friend Rust says that there used to be only dark and it seems like the light is winning now. I like that. I like to sit in the light. Don't you? It must be hard for you because Abigail is the dark, must be awfully difficult to be her'

Alana smiles a bit, 'I shouldn't really talk about a patient'

'Of course not. I'm sorry. I'll think about you both though, in the light'

'Alana, how's Margot? I liked her at The Party. She seemed like fun? I only talked to her briefly at Jimmy's'

'Yes. She's great. Obviously worried that I'm a bit over involved in the case, being friends with everyone on the suspect list'

The silence then is ringing,

'I'm so sorry. That came out all wrong. I shouldn't have said it like that.'

'Alana? Is it true though?'

'That everyone is suspected? Of being the perpetrator or of abetting them in some way? I'm afraid so. Yes. Sorry'

'That isn't what I meant. I wanted to know if you are really friends still?'

There's just a beat of a pause too long 'of course. Definitely. I wouldn't be here otherwise'

They manage to get over the hump of that bit of the conversation and it is almost ok until the very end,

'Alright girl, maybe we should get together, with the lab bros. You know Jimmy is seeing Chilton don't you? What do you think?'

'Maybe it would be a good idea to wait a bit. Let things settle down'

Beverly looks straight at Alana 'what do you mean? And anyway who the fuck are you and what have you done with Alana Bloom who I thought had more sense than to listen to a seventeen year old punk psycho teflon bitch'

'She's eighteen now'

'So not the point I was making, and you know it. Or you used to. What the hell is happening here? Hannibal was your fucking mentor when you were a student. You've known Will and me for years. You know the science bros. Jack. Everyone. You even know Freddie fucking Lounds (sorry Mischa, I take that back). And Freddie sodding Chilton. You seem to be saying you believe that toe rag over any of us!'

'I have to be willing for her to be speaking the truth. It's her truth. I won't deny her that. If she's going to have any kind of future she needs to be able to hold on to her truths.'

'Wow! She's just choosing a truth that suits her best.'

'But we all do that'

'But we aren't all psychopaths, she killed maybe 10 people Alana. 10 people! And she's setting your "friends" up to take the fall for at least some of those. She's obsessive. A very effective manipulator, and you're enabling and encouraging her!!' Her voice rises as she gets angrier,

'Beverly' Hannibal is quiet and lays a hand on her arm gently, she looks at him

'Fuck. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry Hannibal, Mischa'

'Oh Beverly it's alright. Don't be upset. We know, and that's what matters. It doesn't matter if people who don't love us think badly of us. Really it doesn't. Come with me, let's go and find you something nice'

Mischa gets up and pulls Beverly out of the room by her hand. They can hear them go up the stairs, Mischa murmuring something as they go.

Alana looks at Hannibal and Will 'I know you won't agree, but I have to try and have some professional detachment about this. I must. If I'm going to do my job'

'It's fine Alana. I know your work is important to you. You understand though if I'm a bit hurt. Or Bev is, I won't speak for Hannibal'

Alana looks at Hannibal. Waiting for him to say something. He looks as thought there any number of things he might say. In the end he settles on

'Alana, we have been both your friends and your colleagues. Until now it has been possible to be both. I regret that you have decided to privilege one over the other. Perhaps I taught you justice instead of mercy. If so. I regret that. Justice is too often blind. Mercy can be harder to accept as it implies forgiveness. Despite what Mischa said, forgiveness is a considerable effort and usually involves both parties, akin to falling in love, requiring reciprocity. I hope you will find a way to forgive us'

'Hannibal!'

'Alana, I think maybe it'd be better if you go. I know Hannibal is too polite to ask you. As you said, maybe once this is settled'

'Will' she stands up and Will walks her into the hallway. They both pause there and eventually he sticks a hand out, she looks at it utterly aghast.

She hisses 'I didn't even know he had a sister! He didn't trust me. It makes it hard to trust him'

Will withdraws his hand and opens the door with it instead. Closes the door behind her. He leans on it for a moment. Bev and Mischa are coming back down stairs, Mischa takes his arm as they go back into the living room.

The four of them sit down and Mischa says happily,

'oh that was so useful. Now we know exactly what she's doing. I'm so glad Alana came. I expect the two agents in charge have been talking to her too. How excellent. Poor Alana. She will feel such a fool when she works it all out. What you said was lovely Hannibal. For someone to live without mercy? Oh dear'

Beverly puts both her arms round Mischa 'god you're the best thing ever. Thank you. Sorry I shouted before'

'No, it was good. It meant she said more than she should'

Hannibal and Will exchange looks. This is some roller coaster ride. It's a good job Mischa is on board with them!

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The dinner is modestly hilarious. As well as Hannibal, Mischa and Will, Frederick and Jimmy, Bev, Freddie Lounds, and Brian, Rust arrived during the first course and has been pulled into the rambling discourse. It's surprisingly frank given Freddie's presence, but she seems to have decided she's on board. So that's a thing.

Mischa likes Rust enormously so they do some seat swapping so she can sit beside him and exchange odd metaphors and whatever the complete opposite of a metaphor is, she calls them anti-rusts, not against you understand, just the plain version. This is the third time he's come by, the first time only a brief discussion with Jack and Agent Krendler and a long letter left

for Will at Wolf Trap. The second time he stayed for two nights one of which he stayed up almost the whole night talking with Mischa. This time he's here for a few days. He and Will are going fishing tomorrow.

The kind with poles and bait. And flies.

The dinner is really a way of saying thank you for the support whilst Will was at his worst. He's not out of the woods yet. But he and Hannibal have agreed that if a field trip comes up in mid February then he will give himself permission to go. It's the worst of what he has to do. So it's a kind of test of his recovery. Will is hoping it will show that he can manage field work when he's not laid low by a brain disease. They both know it might not be that simple.

What's a trial to them all is the ongoing mess with Abigail. Paul Krendler had to talk to a DA about the case. And though both Will and Hannibal have been kept up to date on what's going on, which they wouldn't be if they were really suspects, it is still uncomfortable. Alana rang Hannibal with an attempt at apologising. It didn't go well. They've agreed to give each other a little space.

Hannibal and Will went out to Wolf Trap a few days ago. There was a lot of fingerprint dust around.

'I thought they'd clear more of this. I'll get someone in. It feels weird to be here. It's been nearly a month. Doesn't quite feel like home now.'

'It is your home though, I know it's been difficult, but it is still yours. I hope you won't let them take it from you.'

'It's ok. Home isn't really a place anyway is it? It's a feeling, an experience. I'm home with you. Wherever we are'

Hannibal loops an arm round his shoulder and nuzzles his hair, just behind his ear. And then sneezes

'You're right about the dust. Do you have a vacuum cleaner?'

'Pan and brush. No point with no carpets. Bang the rugs out of doors. I'm not sure I want to spend time out here cleaning. Do you know anyone? I can probably get one of the scene crews to come in, bit of moonlighting.'

'Will you call them now? I'd like to check the refrigerator, which I fear... oh dear. I'm glad I brought the makings of lunch with us'

'Alright. Will you make some lunch and we take it for a walk? I'd like to see if there's anything new at the Parliament.'

'Really? Any reason'

'Rust asked me to take some pictures'

'Does he have anything concrete to suggest?'

'Don't know. When he comes next week he might have thoughts to share'

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At the end of dinner there is an entertaining division of tasks; washing up, drying up, clearing things away, resetting the dining room, making coffee, moving chairs in the sitting room. Between the nine of them it's a swift job even though Will had to give up twenty minutes in when he nearly drops the plate he is drying

'Sorry, bit tired. I'll be fine. Really.' He sits on the kitchen armchair and lets himself flop

Hannibal says nothing but is watching him out of the corner of his eye. Freddie catches it and smiles at him, so does Rust.

Hannibal and Rust seem to have come to some kind of accommodation. Will matters to both of them. Rust doesn't smoke in the house or under the eaves. Hannibal keeps the heavy liquor out of sight at Rust's request and buys in what he considers to be the most awful beer which disappears steadily even when Hannibal could swear Rust hasn't been near the kitchen.

They're keeping each other on their toes. It's sort of amusing for Will to watch. Though he's restrained from commenting. Or of playing up to Rust. He suspects that a genuinely or legitimately jealous Hannibal would be something he'd rather not see or experience. Hannibal hasn't repeated his thunder god thing since Will was first diagnosed, but it's made him aware that Hannibal can be very vehement probably physically as well as verbally. And thanks? But no thanks.

When they're finally all loafing in the sitting room (even Frederick Chilton is almost learning how to relax in the presence of other people and not be a dick) with coffee or tea or beer, Freddie throws out

'Matthew Brown was arrested today'

Everyone sits up 'how do you know. No sorry I take that back. Wow. That's amazing. Do you know what for?'

'I do.'

'Shit, Freddie tell us'

'Yeah I'm going to I was just enjoying that moment of power. Apparently Abigail accused him of planting the evidence in Will's house. When he took the photos'

'But we know it wasn't then. It was after Christmas'

'Yup. But there's evidence in the house. Abigail has squealed on him. Agent Krendler had to act'

'Oh gods is this more machinating?'

'You betcha. Better start being a bit cleverer with the strategising guys. This ones for free'

'Thank you Freddie. You'll understand if we are a little circumspect in revealing our way forwards to you.'

'I want you to be. That way I can report without any accusation of bias'

'Freddie, no offence but isn't this a bit weird?'

'Yup. That's what I said too. But what do I know? Turns out, you're all alright. And I'm not totally lost to the dark side. If Mischa dumps me though, all bets are off'

'I'd never dump you. I promise. You're my friend'

'I know poppet, and you're mine'

.....

Early the next morning Will and Rust drive to a lake not far from Wolf Trap where Will usually goes ice fishing. Hannibal had wordlessly made them two flasks of coffee and food to take with them. It had been very very early. Will had kissed him a lot before they left. Had even been somewhat clingy. It's not the first time he's been out somewhere without Hannibal since they returned, but it will be the longest.

Their plan is that they'll fish until about 4:00 pm or until they're too cold to talk and then come back to Wolf Trap. If they've caught anything that's what they'll eat for dinner. If they haven't Hannibal and Mischa are bringing emergency back up food. Bev may or may not come. She's got a court appearance today as an expert witness.

Rust is driving so tonight he'll either come back to Baltimore or he might stay at Wolf Trap. He's another man who likes his quiet. And there's a fair few books of Will's he wouldn't mind cosy-ing up with.

'You like him don't you? A lot. I don't just mean for now. You're in it for the long haul? I can kind of taste it. Feels like permanence. You're right too, he's a romantic. Courtly. I hear trumpets and horses galloping and the clash of the joust when he talks to you, looks at you. How's the sex?'

'It's good. He's good. I know he seems all buttoned up but...'

'No no. The point of buttons is the unbuttoning. All the way. He has a lot of buttons. It's a good look on him'

'It is. And he is kind of courtly. But the sex is, something else. It's good. I don't even have the right words for it. It's everything. I guess. I feel consumed. In a good way, like purified, like someone poured out mercy and put me in the way of it. Like a fish that's been dying in the sunshine and gets to breathe in the water. It's intense. Sometimes there's a lot of humour. He's quite dry sometimes. I don't mean... I mean he gets it, me'

'He keep up with you? That what you're saying?'

'Yes. And the other way round. He's got this whole mind palace thing, I find him in some of the rooms. I mean that. I walk in and walk around, and go find him. Not always, sometimes I'm there and he's not. But sometimes. That's pretty intense too.'

'Is this why you think it's only 0.1%?'

'No. it's why I think it's as much as that! I'm nearly blinded by him, utterly subsumed by him, it's amazing, but I still know I have to give myself that margin. I have to. Sometimes, when we're just in the same room I know who he is. Who he really is. And there's no difference between me and him'

'Does he feel the same thing?'

'Oh yeah. And the same terror'

'Good. We are meant for awe. And adoration. It separates us from the rest of the beasts. He ok with me being round?'

'Yes. He did ask. About if there was an us'

'What did you say?'

'That I'd wanted to, but back then it wasn't a goer'

'I'd have been toxic for you. Maybe the other way round as well. You'd have got as far into my head as you are into his. I don't do well with co-habitation. I like my mind free and running clear'

'You're still my friend Rust'

'I'm glad you think so'

'Have you thought about it all?'

'I have. I went up to Port Haven, hung around a little, did some fill in work in the cafe near by. Barista. Dressed nice for a few days. Talked to some sweet chatty nurses. Took a couple of them out. I'd say she's getting ready to do something'

'Ok. That's above and beyond, thanks Rust. What do you mean?'

'One of the nurses says she's giving away stuff, or selling it. Going around being all nervous and shit. Shaky. The thing with the cousin. They had an argument apparently. But the nurse I talked to said she thought it was faked. Abigail wants him out of the way. Hard to know what for exactly. Something that he can't be accused of possibly. Where he's got an unbreakable alibi.'

'Ok. That's doesn't sound good. That sounds bad actually. If she's giving away stuff she maybe expects to be gone soon. Wants some cash. Fuck, Rust. This keeps getting worse. How can we see it off?'

'Just make sure neither of you get caught without an alibi for an extended period. Or where you're only each other's alibi. Don't stay out here on your own. Even if you fall out. Don't come out here. I love your place, but you're too isolated.'

'Yeah ok. I'll talk to Hannibal about it. Thanks. A lot. You hungry?'

'I could eat. I won't have the beer yet, I'll wait until later. I guess he'd have strong views on me driving you around with a few cans inside me'

'You're right. He would. And I can't drive yet. Sorry.'

'Don't be. It's only an addiction. I'll suffer, but I won't die'

.....

'Did you enjoy the day?' Hannibal hands Will a cup of warm milk with honey. This has rapidly become a habit and they often finish the day in the kitchen with a last warm drink. Before one or both of them go to bed.

'I did, it was great. I haven't had a whole day fishing for, actually it's been so long I don't know when. What did you think of Rust's theory?'

'It seems eminently likely. We may need to think through what we do about where we stay when you're ready to go back to Wolf Trap. I'm slightly reluctant to leave Mischa alone here. But I'm not sure it's viable to bring her to Wolf Trap each time.'

'Yeah, I think that might feel a bit weird. Worse than when my dad was in the tipi'

'Mischa makes an unlikely chaperone. She's more likely to be slightly too curious. I'd be sorry to lose the liberty the house currently offers us'

Will smiles. He hadn't said this to Rust but the house's isolation had certainly been to their advantage over Christmas. Shit that was only what four, five weeks ago. Gods, being ill had taken up time in such a weird way. It felt like forever and yet everything was really recent. Rust was right, it's just become something that feels permanent. Already.

'Where were you Will?'

'Thinking about you. Being here. With you. Good things. A lot of good things. You're still ok with me being here? Dads coming in a few days. Give you a bit of a break'

'Will. I never need a break from you. Your endless wit, occasionally, and especially your early morning cheer and exuberance. But not from you, never from you.'

'Funny man. Do you want to come to bed now, or are you going to read for a bit? I think I'm going up. It was a good day. But I'm a bit tired' Will stretches as he stands up from the kitchen island.

'I'll follow you up, I want to answer some emails. Maybe about ten minutes' he reaches for his tablet,

'I won't promise to be awake' Will looks down at him and puts a hand on Hannibal's shoulder, just lightly, and squeezes.

'Of course. Kiss me now, in case'

Hannibal smiles up at Will as he leans over him.

None of the messages in Hannibal's email inbox are answered that night.

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